

ing to the office, she receives “a severe blow to my working woman ego” (3) when she is laid off, yet quickly consoles herself with the idea that (thanks to unemployment compensation) she can now enjoy a paid vacation. Leisure, however, will prove elusive.

At her neighbour Bibienne’s house, Pauline sips Mai Tais and visits an Internet Tarot site. The reading there shows her “the Queen of Cups, the good woman card, seated in the terribly auspicious Position One” (5), representing Pauline herself. The specific site she visits is not mentioned, but a similar online site describes the Queen as “a woman who has more feeling and imagination than common sense” [<http://www.biddytarot.com>], a description that fits Pauline all too well. Although she has been trained in the military as a wilderness survival expert, she seems unlikely to survive the travails of work and family life.

Cups of coffee, cups of laundry detergent, even bra cups define Pauline’s life. She veers from fitful job hunts to make-over misadventures with henna powder to an encounter with a bear while camping with her two younger children, Jack and Olympia, to troubles with dog-sitting, to bridesmaids from hell when her old army friend Regina decides to get married. Motherhood brings her more exasperation than joy. She regrets abandoning her youthful motto: “Never have kids, pets or plants” (13). She worries that her husband Donald may be straying, envies the freedom of her teenaged daughter Serenity and her own widowed mother, and yearns for an affair with Michael, the handsome teacher with whom she shares “coffee and Camus” (82). With her worry about “fanny size” (11), her crush on Michael, and her daydreaming, this sardonic anti-heroine is like a much-married version of Bridget Jones, only funnier. She is aware of the women’s movement, without getting much benefit from it: “I adopted a radical feminist perspective on doughnuts and gained two sizes” (35). It is a tribute to her pluck and wit that she remains a sympathetic character to readers throughout her few triumphs and many misfortunes. Let’s

Seven Floors Up

Cati Porter.

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Reviewed by Dorsía Smith Silva

Cati Porter’s volume of poetry, *Seven Floors Up*, explores events of everyday life and meditates on the details of women’s diverse experience: raising children, caring for parents and pets, and balancing the responsibilities of household tasks. While most of the poems in this collection focus on domestic experi-

ence, several address such issues as sexual abuse, the aftermath of rape, and the ability of language to transform meaning and perception. The collection consists of three untitled sections which probe the common themes of individual identity, marriage, mothering and motherhood, sexuality, sexual assault, death, and nature and art. Porter's belief that life is a complex blend of overlapping events is revealed in "Marriage as Board Game." As Scrabble pieces build and rebuild words, they also convey the thoughts of the speaker, her mother, stepmother, and mother-in-law: "My mom / spells out *DIVORCE*. I shake / my head. My stepmom lays *SEX* / on the board. I shake my head again. / My mother-in-law giggles, sticks an M / before *emptied's* unencumbered E, / spelling, at last, *ME*." The linguistic word play continues in the poem "mum," in which Porter focuses on the different meanings of the word ("sound made with closed lips," "abbreviation of *chrysanthemum*," "pet word for 'mother,' short for *mummy*," "mother," and "mother tongue") and links them to various reflections on the mother-daughter relationship. The most memorable poems show how daughter and mother alike repress their experience of sexual abuse and rape: "my cousin announced that *it* happened to / my mother, too, she said it as though / I already knew" and "In my room in the dark I think about *it* every night, won- / dering if *it* would have ever happened to me had my mother / told me *it* had happened to her first."

"The Mum Bell" and "Drawing the Name" explore touching moments of motherhood. In "The Mum Bell," the speaker recalls being eight months pregnant and feeling the weight of her belly. As she joins her toddler son in touching her protruding stomach, she senses life moving—her "mum bell" ringing. "Drawing the Name" expresses concerns about naming one's child. The speaker feels burdened by this responsibility and hopes the name she chooses will suit her son: "to begin the invention / of an identity, is harder than imagined."

Porter saves her most notable poems for the last section. "Administering My Dog's Cancer Therapy, I Think about My Sons" connects the sacrifices the speaker makes as she cares for her sick dog and the even greater sacrifices she would make for her children. While she feeds her dog chicken breasts, she would be willing to cut off her breasts and feed them to her children if they needed them to survive "through the night." In "The Game We Play," Porter revisits daughter-mother tension during a Scrabble game. Here, daughter and mother use "cute" words to avoid the mother's impending death. Inevitably, the Scrabble words do not mask the daughter's grief: "You let me win, your score just shy. / And I let you continue to hope that I won't fall apart when you die."

Seven Floors Up is a memorable collection of impressive poems that evoke day-to-day life and women's manifold experiences.